

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1623

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SUBJECT: STUDENTS STRIKE THROUGHOUT KATHMANDU

1. ON APRIL 10 STUDENTS IN VARIOUS CAMPUSES OF TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY SUBMITTED A LIST OF GRIEVANCES TO UNIVERSITY AUTHORITIES IN WHICH, AMONG OTHER THINGS, THEY DEMANDED THE ABOLITION OF THE CREDIT HOUR SYSTEM (INSTRODUCED UNDER THE NEW EDUCATIONAL REFORM) AND A 250 RUPEE INCREASE IN THE MONTHLY STIPEND PAID TO STUDENTS WORKING IN THE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT SERVICE.

2. FOLLOWING THE UNIVERSITY'S FAILURE TO ACT ON THE DEMANDS, STUDENTS BECAME SOMEWHAT MORE MILITANT AND BY THE END OF THE MONTH HAD SUBMITTED ADDITIONAL REQUESTS WHICH NOW NUMBER 28. ACCORDING TO UNIVERSITY AUTHORITIES THE STUDENTS HAVE REQUESTED ABOLISHING CERTAIN COMPULSORY EXAMINATIONS, RELEASE OF ALL STUDENTS CURRENTLY DETAINED BY POLICE, RESTORATION OF THE AUTONOMOUS CAMPUS SYSTEM, AND INDEPENDENT STUDENT CONTROL OF ALL EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES. MANY OF THESE DEMANDS STRIKE AT THE HEART OF THE EDUCATIONAL REFORM WHICH WAS AIMED AT INTRODUCING A SEMESTER SYSTEM WHICH WOULD FORCE STUDENTS TO COMPLETE SEMESTER EXAMINATIONS BEFORE PROMOTION TO THE NEXT HIGHEST GRADE.

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3. IN ADDITION TO THESE PURELY INTERNAL ADMINISTRATIVE REQUESTS,

STUDENTS IN THE LAST WEEK OF APRIL "POLITICIZED" THEIR DEMANDS BY THE INCLUSION OF A REQUEST TO RESCIND RECENT PRICE INCREASES FOR SUGAR AND RICE, AS WELL AS THE DECISION TO INCREASE INTEREST RATES THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY (KATHMANDU 1930). THIS STEP WAS PROBABLY AN EFFORT TO GAIN PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR THE STRIKE AND IT HAS SUCCEEDED TO SOME DEGREE.

4. ON APRIL 22 THE PRO-PEKING ALL NEPAL NATIONAL INDEPENDENT STUDENTS UNION IN LALITPUT DECIDED TO INJECT YET ANOTHER ISSUE INTO THE CONTROVERSY BY FORWARDING A LETTER OF PROTEST TO THE INDIAN EMBASSY ON THAT COUNTRY'S RECENT POLICY TOWARD SIKKIM. PARTLY AS A RESULT OF GOVERNMENT EFFORTS TO DEFUSE THE SIKKIM ISSUE THIS HAS NOT BECOME A FOCAL POINT OF PUBLIC REACTION AS IT HAD IN LAST FALL'S STRIKE IN KATHMANDU CAMPUSES.

5. STUDENTS TOOK THE INITIATIVE ON APRIL 27 AND HIJACKED A LOCAL BUS, AND TWO DAYS LATER A CAMPUS CHIEF WAS BEATEN UP BY STRIKING STUDENTS. THE POLICE MOVED SWIFTLY TO BREAK UP THE RIOT AND ARRESTED TWO STUDENTS. AS THE SITUATION THREATENED TO GET OUT OF CONTROL HOME MINISTER BHOJ RAJ GHIMERE MET WITH STUDENT LEADERS APRIL 28. TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY AUTHORITIES BACKED DOWN FROM THEIR PREVIOUS STAND AND ANNOUNCED THAT STUDENTS WHO HAD FAILED IN SEMESTER EXAMS WOULD BE ALLOWED TO TAKE MAKE-UP EXAMINATIONS. THESE EFFORTS APPEAR, HOWEVER, TO HAVE MADE LITTLE IMPRESSION ON THE STUDENTS WHO CONTINUE THEIR STRIKE.

6. DESPITE A THREAT THAT STUDENTS WHO FAILED TO APPEAR FOR EXAMINATIONS MAY 4 WOULD BE DROPPED FROM THE UNIVERSITY, STRIKES NOW AFFECT ALL KATHMANDU CAMPUSES. IN A FACE-SAVING GESTURE THE UNIVERSITY HAS ANNOUNCED THAT CAMPUSES WILL REMAIN CLOSED FOR "SEVERAL DAYS" BEYOND THE MAY 4 DEADLINE WHILE EFFORTS AT NEGOTIATION CONTINUE. THE UNIVERSITY HAS ISSUED AN ASSURANCE THAT ALL 28 DEMANDS ARE BEING STUDIED AND LEGITIMATE GRIEVANCES WILL BE RECTIFIED AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. FURTHER DISTURBANCES WERE REPORTED ON MAY 5, AND INSPECTOR GENERAL OF POLICE BARAL TOLD THE DCM THAT HE HAD BEEN FORCED TO RETURN FROM LEAVE IN ORDER TO HANDLE THE SITUATION.

7. AS OF NOW THE CONFLICT HAS YET TO BE RESOLVED. CLASSES REMAIN SUSPENDED AS AUTHORITIES SEEK TO AVOID A CONFRONTATION
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OVER THE ISSUE OF EXPULSION OF THOSE STUDENTS WHO FAIL TO APPEAR FOR EXAMS.

8. COMMENT: IT IS NOT CLEAR FROM OUR INFORMATION WHO IS LEADING THE CURRENT MOVEMENT AMONG STUDENTS. A NUMBER OF STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS (INCLUDING BOTH PRO-GOVERNMENT AND ANTI-GOVERNMENT STUDENT GROUPS) HAVE ATTEMPTED TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE SITUATION TO WIN SUPPORT FROM THE STUDENT BODY. THERE HAVE

BEEN UNSUBSTANTIATED CHARGES THAT SOME FORMER GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS HAVE URGED THE STUDENTS TO ACTION IN AN EFFORT TO EMBARRASS THE NEW GOVERNMENT OF PRIME MINISTER RIJAL, WHILE OTHERS HAVE SAID THAT THE GOVERNMENT'S RELUCTANCE TO CRACK DOWN CAN BE TRACED TO THE RUMOR THAT STUDENT LEADERS HAVE OBTAINED CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION ON THE GOVERNMENT'S EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS BY BREAKING INTO OFFICES OF THE UNIVERSITY.

9. TO DATE THE STRIKE HAS BEEN CONFINED TO KATHMANDU VALLEY, BUT THERE IS A GOOD CHANCE THAT IT MAY SPREAD TO OTHER EQUALLY POLITICAL SENSITIVE AREAS OF THEC COUNTRY. ON APRIL 20 THERE WAS A REPORT THAT STUDENTS MARCHED IN BIRATNAGAR TO PROTEST PRICE INCREASES AS WELL AS SIKKIM'S MERGER WITH INDIA.

10. UNIVERSITY AUTHORITIES HAVE EXPRESSED THEIR CONCERN TO MISSION MEMBERS THAT UNLESS THE ISSUES ARE QUICKLY RESOLVED IT COULD MEAN A LONG SHUTDOWN OF THE UNIVERSITY. THIS WOULD HAVE IMPLICATION FOR A VARIETY OF US PROGRAMS INCLUDING AID AND FULBRIGHT PROGRAMS. CARGO

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